

DECISION RECORD

Reference: Environmental Assessment (EA) for Grazing Authorization, #NM-060-00-155

Decision: It is my decision to authorize the issuance of a ten year grazing lease to Shafie Hindi Ranch Co. for the Bureau of Land Management grazing allotment #62047. The lease will authorize 15 Animal Units (AU's) yearlong at 100 percent federal range for 180 Animal Unit Months (AUM's). Cattle will be the authorized class of livestock.

Any additional mitigation measures identified in the environmental impacts sections of the referenced environmental assessment have been formulated into stipulations, terms and conditions.

If you wish to protest this proposed decision in accordance with 43 CFR 4160.2, you are allowed 15 days to do so in person or in writing to the authorized officer, after the receipt of this decision. Please be specific in your points of protest. In the absence of a protest, this proposed decision will become the final decision of the authorized officer without further notice, in accordance with 43 CFR 4160.3. A period of 30 days following receipt of the final decision, or 30 days after the date the proposed decision becomes final, is provided for filing an appeal and petition for the stay of the decision, for the purpose of a hearing before an Administrative Law Judge (43 CFR 4.470). The appeal shall be filed with the office of the Field Office Manager, 2909 West Second, Roswell, NM, 88201, and must state clearly and concisely your specific points.

Signed by T. R. Kreager
Assistant Field Manager-Resources

5/31/01
Date

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
for
GRAZING AUTHORIZATION

ALLOTMENT 62047

EA-NM-060-00-155

July, 2000

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Roswell Field Office
Roswell, New Mexico

I. Introduction

When authorizing livestock grazing on public range, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has historically relied on a land use plan and environmental impact statement to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). A recent decision by the Interior Board of Land Appeals, however, affirmed that the BLM must conduct a sitespecific NEPA analysis before issuing a permit or lease to authorize livestock grazing. This environmental assessment fulfills the NEPA requirement by providing the necessary site-specific analysis of the effects of issuing a new grazing lease on allotment 62047.

The scope of this document is limited to the effects of issAg a 10 year grazing lease. Other actions such as range improvement projects will be addressed in a project specific environmental assessment. There are no current plans for additional management actions on this allotment.

A. Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action

The purpose of issuing a new grazing lease would be to authorize livestock grazing on public lands on allotment 62047. The lease would specify the types and levels of use authorized, and the terms and conditions of the authorization pursuant to 43 CFR §§4130.3, 4130.3-1, 4130.3-2, and 4180.1.

B. Conformance with Land Use Planning

The Roswell Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (October 1997) has been reviewed to determine if the proposed action conforms with the land use plan's Record of Decision. The proposed action is consistent with the RMP/EIS.

C. Relationships to Statutes, Regulations, or Other Plans

The proposed action is consistent with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (43 U.S.C. 1700 et seq.); the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 (43 U.S.C. 315 et seq.), as amended; the Clean Water Act (33 U.S.C. 1251 et seq.), as amended; the Endangered Species Act (16 U.S.C. 1535 et seq.) as amended; the Federal Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978 (43 U.S.C. 1901 et seq.); Executive Order 11988, Floodplain Management and Executive Order 11990, Protection of Wetlands.

Proposed Action and Alternatives

A. Proposed Action:

The proposed action is to authorize Shafie Hindi Ranch Co.a grazing lease for allotment 62047. The grazing lease would be for 15 cows yearlong at 100% federal range for 180 animal unit months. The grazing lease applies to the federal land only and does not reflect all livestock on the entire ranch.

B. No Lease authorization alternative:

This alternative would not issue a new grazing lease. There would be no livestock grazing authorized on the public land within allotment 62047.

III. Affected Environment

A. General Setting

Allotment 62047 is located in Guadalupe County, approximately 11 miles south of Vaughn, New Mexico. The allotment consists of 720 acres of public land and approximately 7040 acres of private land.

This allotment lies outside the boundary of the Roswell Grazing District established subsequent to the Taylor Grazing Act (TGA). Grazing authorization on Public Lands outside the Grazing District boundary is governed by section 15 of the TGA. Livestock numbers for the ranch are not controlled under this section 15 lease. The lessee is billed for the amount of forage available for livestock on the public land. Vegetation monitoring studies are used to determine the amount of available forage for livestock on the public land.

The landscape is rolling, grass covered hills dissected by one major intermittent draw. The draw that crosses this allotment is Marino Draw. More detailed information of the area is discussed under the affected resources section.

The following resources or values are not present or would not be affected: Prime/Unique Farmland, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Minority/Low Income Populations, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Hazardous/Solid Wastes, Wetlands/Riparian Zones. Native American Religious Concerns, Wilderness, Floodplains. Cultural inventory surveys would continue to be required for public actions involving surface disturbing activities.

B. Affected Resources

1. Soils: In general, the soils in the area are Clovis-Pastura loams and the PasturaHarvey-Darvey fine sandy loams. The soils vary from very shallow to very deep, are well drained, and found on nearly level to moderately sloped areas. The soils are derived predominately from limestone and sandstone. For in depth soil information, please refer to the unpublished soil survey of Guadalupe County, New Mexico. A copy of this document may be reviewed at the BLM Roswell Field Office or at a local NRCS office.

2. Vegetation: This allotment is within the pinyon-juniper vegetative community as identified in the Roswell Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (RMP/EIS). Vegetative communities managed by the Roswell Field Office are identified and explained in the RMP/EIS. Appendix 11 of the draft RMP/EIS describes the Desired Plant Community (DPC) concept and identifies the components of each community. The distinguishing feature for the pinyon -juniper community is that the area does have the potential to have pinyon, juniper, or mountain mahogany in the description of the potential plant community. The primary consideration for inclusion into this community type is the influence of topography, elevations, and slopes. This community type has smaller areas that are scattered throughout other types such

as grasslands. Grass is the most abundant species present.

Monitoring data indicates that the vegetative conditions on allotment 62047 achieve the multiple resource objectives established in the Roswell RMP. Livestock stocking levels are within the allowable vegetation utilization range. Monitoring data and analysis are available for review at the Roswell Field Office.

3. Wildlife: Game species occurring within the area include mule deer, mourning dove, and scaled quail. Raptors that utilize the area on a more seasonal basis include the Swainson's, red-tailed, and ferruginous hawks, American kestrel, and great-horned owl. Numerous passerine birds utilize the grassland areas due to the variety of grasses, forbs, and shrubs. The most common include the western meadowlark, mockingbird, horned lark, killdeer, loggerhead shrike, and vesper sparrow.

The more common reptiles include the short-horned lizard, lesser earless lizard, eastern fence lizard, coachwhip, bulisnake, prairie rattlesnake, and western rattlesnake.

A general description of wildlife occupying or potentially utilizing the proposed action area is located in the Affected Environment Section (p. 3-62 to 3-71) of the Draft Roswell RMP/EIS (9/1994).

4. Threatened and Endangered Species: There are no known resident populations of threatened or endangered species on this allotment. A list of federal threatened, endangered, and candidate species reviewed for this EA can be found in Appendix 11 of the Roswell RMP (AP1 1-2). Of the listed species, avian species such as the bald eagle and peregrine falcon may be observed in the general geographic area during migration or the winter months. There are no known records of these species having occurred on the allotment, and no designated critical habitat areas are within the allotment.

5. Livestock Management: The allotment is operated as a cattle and sheep ranch. The allotment consists of two pastures and one trap which aid in livestock movement and restraint. Two water wells, water pipeline, drinking troughs and earthen reservoirs provide livestock water throughout the allotment.

6. Visual Resources: The allotment is located within a Class IV Visual Resource Management area. This means that contrasts may attract attention and be a dominant feature in the landscape in terms of scale. However, the changes should repeat the basic elements of the landscape.

7. Water Quality: No perennial surface water is found on the Public Land on this allotment.

8. Air Quality: Air quality in the region is generally good. The allotment is in a Class 11 area for the Prevention of Significant Deterioration of air quality as defined in the public Clean Air Act. Class 11 areas allow a moderate amount of air quality degradation.

9. Recreation: Recreation opportunities are very limited in this grazing allotment because the public has limited legal/physical access to public lands. The parcels of Public lands within this

allotment are scattered and are generally surrounded by private lands.

Off Highway Vehicle designation for public lands within this allotment are classified as "Limited" to existing roads and trails.

Due to the fact that public land boundaries are not marked adequately or identified by signs and/or fences, the public use of these BLM lands are limited.

10. Caves/Karst: This allotment is located within a designated area of high karst and cave potential. A complete significant cave or karst inventory has not been completed for the public lands located in this grazing allotment. No significant caves or karst features are known to exist within this allotment.

11. Invasive/Non-Native Species: There are no known occurrences of invasive/non-native species on allotment 62047 and monitoring for new occurrences in the future will be conducted on an intermittent basis.

IV. Environmental Impacts

A. Impacts of the Proposed Action

1. Soils: Proper utilization levels and grazing distribution patterns are expected to retain sufficient vegetative cover on the allotment, this will maintain the stability of the soils. Soils compaction and high vegetative use will occur at small, localized areas such as bedding areas, watering locations, and along trails. Positive affects from the proposed action may include acceleration of the nutrient cycling, and chipping of the soil crust by hoof action may stimulate seedling growth and water infiltration.

2. Vegetation: Vegetation will continue to be grazed and trampled by domestic livestock as well as other herbivores. Ecological condition and trend is expected to remain stable and/or improve over the long term with the proposed authorized number of livestock and existing pasture management. Rangeland vegetation inventory data indicates that there is an adequate amount of forage for the multiple resource use objectives. The juniper can be expected to increase slightly in density whether the area is grazed by livestock or not.

3. Wildlife: Domestic livestock will continue to utilize vegetative resources needed by a variety of wildlife species for life history functions within this allotment. The magnitude of livestock grazing impacts on wildlife is dependent upon the species of wildlife being considered, and it's habitat needs. On this allotment, it can be generally stated that the sheep and the mule deer are in direct competition for forage. Livestock numbers and wildlife numbers have most likely reached a balance since the area has been grazed for over 100 years. Stocking rate adjustments have been made in the past to minimize the competition for those vegetative resources needed by a variety of wildlife species. Cover habitat for wildlife will increase as the pinion and juniper increases. Maintenance and operation of existing water locations will continue to provide dependable water sources for wildlife, as well as livestock.

4. T&E species: Livestock grazing as a result of the grazing permit will not affect any threatened or endangered species of plants or animals on this allotment.

5 Livestock Management: Livestock would continue to be grazed under the same management system. No adverse impacts are anticipated under the proposed action.

6. Visual Resources The continued grazing of livestock would not affect the form or color of the landscape. The primary appearance of the vegetation within the allotment will remain the same.

7. Water Quality: Direct impacts to surface water quality would be minor, short-term impacts during stormflow. Indirect impacts to water-quality related resources, such as fisheries, would not occur. The proposed action would not have a significant effect on ground water. Livestock would be dispersed over the allotment, and the soil would filter potential contaminants.

8. Air Quality: Dust levels under the proposed action would be slightly higher than under the no grazing alternative due to allotment management activities. The levels would be within the limits allowed in a Class 11 area for the Prevention of Significant Deterioration of air quality.

9. Recreation: Grazing should have little or no impact on the dispersed recreational opportunities within this allotment. Public lands are well blocked and accessible via county maintained roads. The evidence or presence of livestock can negatively affect visitors who desire solitude, unspoiled landscape views, or to hike without seeing signs of livestock. However, grazing can benefit some forms of recreation, such as hunting, by creating new water sources for game animals.

10. Caves/Karst: No known significant cave or karst features are known to exist on this allotment. There is a high potential that caves do exist in the area. If a significant cave is found, protection measures would be placed into effect.

B. Impacts of the No Livestock Grazing Alternative.

1. Soils: Soil compaction would be reduced on the allotment around old trails and bedding grounds, there would be a small reduction in soil loss on the allotment.

2. Vegetation: It is expected that the number of plant species found within the allotment will remain the same, however, there would be small changes in the relative percentages of these species. Vegetation will continue to be utilized by wildlife. There would be an increase in the amount of standing vegetation.

3. Wildlife: Wildlife would have no competition with livestock for forage and cover.

4. T&E Species: There would be no impacts to threatened or endangered species or habitat.

5. Livestock management: The forage from public land would be unavailable for use by the lessee. This would have an adverse economic impact to the livestock operation. If the No Grazing alternative is selected, the owner of the livestock would be responsible for ensuring that livestock do not enter Public Land [43 CFR 4140.1(b)(1)]. The intermingled land status on the

allotment makes it economically unfeasible to fence out the public land and use only the private land. The remaining private could not support the number of livestock currently authorized and the lower number of livestock would not provide the level of potential income the operator is accustomed to. The allotment operator would also lose the investment made for the acquisition of the lease and improvements installed privately.

6. Visual Resources: There would be no change in the visual resources.

7. Water Quality: There could be a slight improvement in water quality due to the minor reductions in sediment loading during stormflow.

8. Air Quality: There would be a slightly less dust under this under this alternative versus the proposed alternative, but this would be negligible when considering all sources of dust.

9. Recreation: Impacts would be very minor under the alternative. No positive impacts from livestock watering locations would occur.

10. Caves/Karst: Impacts would be the same as the proposed action if no significant caves are found.

IV. Cumulative Impacts

All of the allotments that have leases/leases with the BLM will have to go through scoping and analysis under NEPA. Allotment 62047 is surrounded by allotments that will be undergoing this process. If the proposed action is selected, there would be no change in the cumulative impacts since it does not vary from the current situation.

If the no livestock grazing alternative is selected, there would be little change in the cumulative impact as long as the surrounding allotments continue to be stocked at their current level. If the lease numbers are reduced on the surrounding ranches as well, the economics of the surrounding communities and/or minority/low income populations would be negatively impacted.

The No Grazing alternative was considered, but not chosen in the Rangeland Reform Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Record of Decision (ROD) (p. 28). The elimination of grazing in the Roswell Field Office Area was also considered but eliminated by the Roswell RMP/ROD (pp. ROD-2).

VI. Residual Impacts

Vegetative monitoring studies have shown that grazing, at the current lease numbers of animals, is sustainable. If the mitigation measures are enacted, then there would be no residual impacts to the proposed action.

VII. Mitigating Measures

Vegetation monitoring studies will continue to be conducted and the lease numbers of livestock

will be adjusted if necessary. If new information surfaces that livestock grazing is negatively impacting other resources, action will be taken at that time to mitigate those impacts.